

MINNESOTA STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 1, 2019 — SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL?

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC) is authorized under Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. More than 51 percent of MNSILC members have a disability.

MNSILC actively recruits its members statewide and from various ethnic backgrounds. People with disabilities, parents, advocates, and those knowledgeable about independent living are encouraged to apply to serve on MNSILC. Members are appointed by the governor to provide guidance to Minnesota’s independent living services.

The main responsibilities of MNSILC are to develop, monitor, review, and evaluate a State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL).

For more information about MNSILC, including how to apply, see the MNSILC website at www.mn.gov/deed/silc.

MNSILC can be found on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MNILNET/>.

MNSILC Mission

The mission is to build upon and strengthen the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Network and to support, coordinate and advance the efforts of Centers for Independent Living statewide. The Minnesota Independent Living Network refers to the entire independent living community, including individuals with disabilities, the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council (MNSILC), the eight Minnesota Centers for Independent Living (CILs), the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development/Vocational Rehabilitation Services and State Services for the Blind.

MNSILC Vision

The Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council has a vision that the independent living philosophy is fully integrated into communities and systems throughout Minnesota and that individuals with disabilities have every opportunity to be self-directed, to live a lifestyle of their choice, free from discrimination and to thrive as members of inclusive and diverse communities.

State Plan for Minnesota Independent Living (SPIL)

During 2020 MNSILC, with assistance from the CILs and other disability partners, created and submitted the 2021-2023 State Plan for Independent Living. The SPIL was approved by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). The IL Network identified two goals to create awareness about the philosophy of independent living and strengthen CILs. The first goal is that the IL Network will promote and reignite the independent living philosophy and movement so that people with disabilities have opportunities to communicate about independent living. The second goal is that Minnesotans will have awareness of and access to independent living services. The third goal of the SPIL is for MNSILC to demonstrate its operational effectiveness and to meet its statutory responsibilities. The entire SPIL can be found on the MNSILC website at www.mn.gov/deed/silc

MNSILC Members

Brian Baker
Christy Caez Claudio
Bonnie Danberry
David Fenley
Rianna Johnsen
Mary Koep
Jessica Lacher

Gloria LaFriniere
Ed Lecher
Linda Lingen
Larry Lura
Nichole Meyer
Mohamed Mourssi-Alfash
Anita Olson

Tom Reed
Judy Sanders
Annette Toews
Julia Washenberger
Brad Westerlund
Nancy Yaklich



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council's (MNSILC) annual report on independent living programs and services.

MNSILC members are appointed by the governor and they, along with the eight Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and other important stakeholders, form the Minnesota Independent Living Network (MNILNET). Members of MNILNET are tasked with statewide planning for services to people with disabilities.

Minnesota's eight CILs provide direct services to people of all ages and disabilities. While each CIL has services unique to its area, all eight are mandated to provide five core services. Those services are: advocacy, information and referral, independent living skills, peer support and mentoring, and transition.

This year MNSILC chose to highlight peer support and mentoring, a concept that is a vital component of the IL philosophy. The idea is that people with disabilities are best positioned to assist others achieve independence and inclusion. They understand the needs and wants of other individuals with disabilities and how best to fulfill those needs. Peer support and mentoring happens in everyone's life, between people of all ages and abilities. However, given the barriers that people with disabilities face, peer support can be indispensable to achieving their goals. The CILs, to varying degrees, have an organized peer support program; one that recruits, trains, and supervises consumers to provide support to other individuals with disabilities.

Peer support and mentoring is crucial for people with disabilities in achieving their goals, being independent, and an integral part of community they chose to live in. The CILs provide the space for people with disabilities to come together to teach each other and learn from each other and to achieve their greatest potential. Through their efforts and the efforts of all people with disabilities peer support will continue to positively impact all citizens of Minnesota.

This report includes stories about peer support and mentoring and its impact on individuals and communities along with data on all the services provided by the CILs.

Gratefully,

Anita Olson



Anita Olson, MNSILC Chair



Options Resource Center for Independent Living

THE ART OF FINDING A PEER

One way we accomplish peer visiting is to bring together people with disabilities of similar age. Through such groups people learn from one another and make friendships. Finding peers who you can identify with in rural areas can be difficult; but when you do it across various rural communities, peer relationships can be garnered. Following in her own words is a young lady's story. She is involved in one of our recreational groups. Recreational activities are a challenge when transportation and peers like yourself are so hard to find.

"Starts in April of 2017, my good friend Shelby invite me to a group, and I had a good time, then after that, I ask Kari to help me to getting my driver's license. I meet new people in the groups, learning their stories, how far they come to becoming an adult. I'm learning from them, also at my job to how to talk to my boss, if I feel uncomfortable with a coworker, I just take a breath in and out and go up to the boss and ask them to meet me somewhere to talk about the problem at hand. Also, at the Options I'm learning how to be honest, to be myself, like helping with getting my license and with cooking and my anxiety. They are helping me to be independent and also learning to ask for help."

BRAIN INJURY SUPPORT GROUP: CLASSIC PEER MENTORING

Nearly four years ago Robyn Block walked into SMILES and said she wanted to start a brain injury support group. She had no idea how to do this. She had never facilitated a group, but she had participated in one. And she had ideas – hundreds of ideas.

An extremely determined young woman, Robyn was quick to share her ideas with SMILES staff and willing to pursue whatever it might take to make her ideas a reality. A brain injury warrior as a result of a near fatal ski accident, Robyn experienced low expectations from those who cared for and about her, she was warned about the barriers that she might never overcome, and was surrounded by people who wanted to protect her, shelter her from further harm, struggles and disappointment. A survivor and warrior, Robyn wanted to reach out and help others where common experiences and ideas could be shared. She knew that listening was critical to survival and being able to share frustrations and coping mechanisms would be the group's key to success. She knew this because this is her life. She lives this every single day as a brain injury warrior. And she knew she was not alone.

A foundational belief of the independent living philosophy is self-determination. Rather than having others decide for you, as a person with a disability you have the power, the ability, and the right to determine your needs and the direction of your life. And it was in that spirit, SMILES Center for Independent Living decided to support her goal.

While her group is small, there is nothing small about the depth of their caring and sharing. They share common concerns and works together to support each other – a classic case of peer mentoring. Their shared frustrations and their shared bonds shape their meetings. Together they determine topics of conversation. Together they support each other. They know better than anyone how important it is to share their experiences and work toward solutions shaped by experiences.

When COVID hit, the group was put on hiatus for the first time in more than three years. They were unable to meet. This summer they tried to gather in a local park – outdoors and socially distanced. They rediscovered their need for each other and the comfort, support, and advocacy they shared. As one participant stated, this is the only group, the only set of other people I can talk to and feel comfortable with outside of my son and my mother. The group is working toward coming together virtually. They need each other and SMILES will be there to support them through technology.

FOSTERING PEER SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP

Peer relationships can be vital to independent living success by offering knowledge through learned experiences, support and encouragement in achieving independent living goals, and connection to resources that meet needs specific to the individual. The Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL) supports a variety of non-consumer group activities that facilitate opportunities for the development of peer support relationships. These group activities are open to the public as a means of reaching out to underserved populations. Examples of these from the past year include the Marshall Area Social Rec and Parents Supporting Parents groups.

SWCIL sponsors the Marshall Area Social Recreation community group which offers social/recreation activities and opportunities to develop and foster peer support relationships. Marshall Social Rec events and activities are planned by a volunteer committee of participants. Events held during FFY 2020 included large-group community events (dances, meals, games, etc.), coloring club activities, craft nights, a game night, and online peer connection activities. Large group events are held at a rented hall, community center, or online. During the period of October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020, Marshall Area Social Rec held 22 events. A total of 255 participants (duplicated count) attended these events.

- Large Group Dances/Activities: 4 events, 120 participants
- Coloring Club: 6 events, 35 participants
- Craft Night: 2 events, 49 participants
- Game Night: 1 event, 3 participants
- Conversations, Coffee, and Me (online connection with peers during the MN stay at home order): 8 events, 48 participants
- Earth Day Challenge (offered through social media)

During FFY 2020 SWCIL also initiated an ongoing, participant led, interactive forum for parents, caregivers, and guardians of children (of all ages) with disabilities to share struggles, offer ideas and resources, and provide and receive ongoing support. Attendees have discussed various struggles securing appropriate services for their children at school and through waiver programs, especially during the pandemic. Increased social isolation is also addressed. Participants have offered ideas and peer support and have encouraged and explored means to advocate for their children.





ANGELA: PEER MENTOR OFFERS SUPPORT FROM SOCIAL EVENTS TO COPING SKILLS

I receive peer services at Independent Lifestyles, a Center for Independent Living in Sauk Rapids. I have worked with them for about four years. Peer services have been very helpful for me in a lot of different ways. I am glad that I am involved in such a helpful program. This program has helped me to get out into the community and do things such as social events and retreats, and I now feel more comfortable doing so. I also appreciate my peer mentor for coming out to my home or calling me almost every other week to help me work on goals.

When we meet, we talk about self-esteem, thoughts, feelings, being independent, and learning to advocate for my needs. My peer has shared various coping skills that I could try to help me, such as journaling, affirmations, fact-checking, using distractions, role-playing, and mindfulness and relaxation apps on my phone. My peer mentor really listens to me and is willing to help me reach my goals. I enjoy the peer to peer support as I feel as though I'm more understood knowing that my peer has dealt with similar struggles.



SUSAN: AN IMMEDIATE CONNECTION WITH HER PEER MENTOR

I'm Susan and this is how my life was: I was depressed and stayed at home with my family. I had one PCA that came into my home because I'm a quadriplegic who uses a wheelchair and needs assistance. I was so lonely. My social worker suggested I contact Independent Lifestyles, who provided me with a peer mentor.

When the peer mentor came to my home, I noticed she too had a disability. I immediately felt a connection with her. We shared stories and she encouraged me. We worked on how to cope with my depression better.

She also helped me get technology in my home. I bought an Alexa and now I can control my TV and lights by my voice. My peer mentor helped me get a voice commanded cell phone so I can communicate with friends and family more effectively. She also got me in contact with someone who put in an automatic door so I can go outside, if I want, independently. This gives me so much more freedom!





IT'S A STRIKE: SOCIALIZATION AND FUN THROUGH BOWLING

It's a Strike is a long-running social activity facilitated by our Peer Mentor, John, who spent many years as an avid and accomplished bowler before his injury. He wanted to share his love of bowling with others.

Bowling is a way to enjoy exercise, practice using muscles, and develop new skills. It's a Strike encourages people with disabilities to learn a new activity and to socialize with other people with disabilities. John creates different games based on suggestions made by the participants – bingo bowling, no-tap bowling, tic-tac-toe bowling, and many others – all designed to take some of the competitiveness out of regular bowling and encourage participants to work together to discuss strategy and help each other to figure out how best to win the games.



Participants also learn how to enter names and information into a computer system and how to solve problems when there are issues with the computers or the pin setters. They have learned who they need to talk to when issues arise that they can't fix themselves.

A core group of about 10 individuals attend regularly, and they always welcome new people when they come. Individuals have told John that they were discouraged from bowling by their family or staff, told that they can't bowl because they are disabled. John always encourages them to try bowling at least a couple of times to discover whether they can learn to bowl and whether they enjoy it or not. After they try it, they can then make an educated decision for themselves.

Many of the consumers bring friends with them to either bowl or watch the others bowl. The group is very friendly, and it does not take new people long to get established within the group. One of the most enjoyable activities the It's a Strike group does is have four-week tournaments a couple of times a year. They love the competition and, because each member of the team has to be there each week to help their team win, the tournaments build camaraderie and teach responsibility. The consumers receive trophies and awards to show them to their friends and family. It's a Strike is continually adding new members to the group and it is a great source of socialization and fun.

INDEPENDENT LIFESTYLES, INC. CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Unique support or services provided through Peer Mentoring

Stats: October 2019-September 2020

ILICIL served a total of 23 individuals through Peer Mentoring. All of them identified their race/ethnicity as being white. Their age ranges were as follows:

- 20-24: 1 individual
- 25-59: 17 individuals
- 60+: 5 individuals

Unique support or services:

- Strong focus on enhancing independence, and not creating dependency
- Provide a supportive relationship in which to discuss and assist the person – with the challenges posed by a disability
- Assist consumers with coping with a disability, overcoming external barriers, goal-setting, self-esteem, healthy relationships, communication, socialization, community integration, and share resources and how to access them independently
- Group services include social and/or support services that are responsive to consumer and community needs, so changes over the years. The current group is It's a Strike bowling, which is described in this report.

PEER SUPPORT HELPS INDIVIDUAL REALIZE DREAMS

In March 2015, SEMCIL met with a newly injured paraplegic in his 20s who needed to apply for Social Security Benefits. An IL coordinator assisted with the application and, while doing so, found that this individual was interested in seeing the accessible kitchen and bathroom at SEMCIL.

An appointment was set up and another IL coordinator met with the individual and explained the accessible features of the IL kitchen and bathroom for ideas for his own home. The individual has always driven a truck and didn't think he would ever be able to do so again now that he is paraplegic. The IL coordinator who demonstrated the kitchen and bathroom is also paraplegic and happens to drive a truck. The coordinator suggested that they should go outside together for a demonstration of the coordinator's technique for transferring into a truck and pulling his wheelchair in after, as well as putting his wheelchair back together and transferring out of the truck. The individual was very happy to see that this was a possibility. Since that visit, it has been found that the individual does indeed now drive a pickup truck.

Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL)

PEER SUPPORT IN MCIL'S COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

By Kelly Krantz

One way that Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL) addressed the very important core service of Peer Mentoring was through our program Community Connections. This educational and leadership experience was funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services Disability Services Division through 2019 with MCIL and other Centers for Independent Living in Minnesota. It offered participants the opportunity to develop their skills to lead and to have an impact of their community. In 2019, 88 people participated in this program.

The focus in the beginning was to offer training to cohorts of people interested in being more engaged in civic life, and then carry out steps to meet personal goals in that area. Later this expanded to include volunteerism and engagement in other types of community organizations or activities, transforming to meet the needs that participants expressed. Through group training in leadership, one-on-one coaching, and developing goals around engagement, individuals with disabilities were empowered to go out and make a difference in ways that were personally meaningful.

Supportive peer relationships formed in the cohorts. Participants were able to coach each other on how to overcome barriers, share about their personal experiences, and cheer on their peers in the group. Some people teamed up to carry out activities such as preparing meals and delivering them to food shelves. Others gained inspiration from hearing each other's ideas. It was common to join the program with a vague feeling of wanting to contribute, and through brainstorming and sharing, peers were helping each other develop goals.

Some people wanted to start out by trying a one-time volunteer opportunity, such as participating in a charity walk, and other people sought an on-going regular activity. Young people sought to gain job skills or try out different interests before committing to a job in the field. Contributing time and energy to a beloved cause like the library or the zoo was a way for participants to give back in a big way to their communities. People found supportive relationships and peer groups through opportunities such as conducting fun activities with seniors or assisting at the Special Olympics. Many people wanted to hone their skills in order to educate groups about disability awareness, such as speaking to law enforcement agencies or other people with disabilities. One of the most amazing things about all of the outcomes is that they were sparked by people with disabilities coming together to learn, support, share, and mentor each other through all these steps.

MARK'S STORY: A PEER IS BORN

Recently divorced after 33 years of marriage, Mark had a failed small business venture and was struggling with depression. He reached out to Access North in 2014 and connected with Steve, an Independent Living Specialist in the Walker office. When they met, Mark was living in a cramped 20-foot travel trailer with no running water or septic.

Mark was interested in looking into adequate housing, but that was not his main concern. His biggest frustration was that he was unable to read. Dyslexia made it hard to perform daily tasks such as paying bills, filing personal papers, and managing finances. He also couldn't read labels on food packages or medications. He joked to Steve that he once thought he was using toothpaste, but it turned out to be hemorrhoid cream. Prior to the divorce, Mark's wife was able to help with these things, but it had now become clear that he needed assistance to live a successful, independent life.

Steve and Mark worked together to explore housing options and filled out applications together to get assistance. Eventually Mark connected with Habitat for Humanity and with hard work and determination he had a beautiful home built. Mark used Access North's Framing Hope Program, got connected to energy and heating assistance, and now had a safe and comfortable place to live.

"I came up here to the woods to hide. I wanted to fade away. I went to sleep hoping I would never wake up," Mark said. "If it hadn't been for Access North I never would have achieved what I have today. Thank you, Access North."

With Mark's housing needs met, he had more time to focus on life with dyslexia. He worked with Steve and our assistive technology staff to try different methods to help with reading. Steve assisted in creating a pictogram file system to help with mail and other important documents.

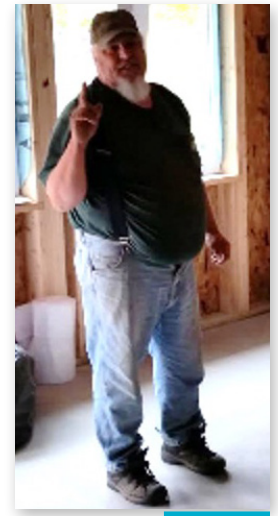
Mark hopes to help others with dyslexia, to help make it easy to use reading and writing apps for phones and computers. He wants others to have help reading mail, reading recipes, using instruction manuals, and paying bills with ease. Mark started Peer Mentoring by creating YouTube videos that demonstrate how to use different devices to help individuals with learning disabilities with a focus on dyslexia.

His dream is to create a one-stop-shop application that would give users the ability to turn speech to text, text to speech, read food labels at the grocery store, help with distinguishing mail from junk mail and reading QR codes on packages, brochures and mailings. Additionally, it could help read web pages, posting on social media sites or filling out forms online.

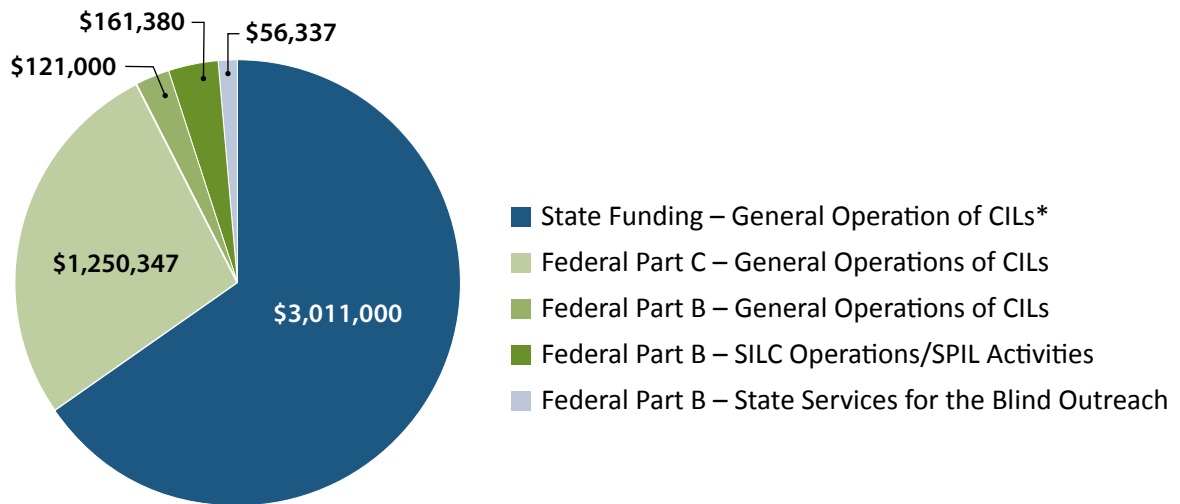
Mark's accomplishments are impressive. Since 2014 he has:

- Improved his confidence with self-advocating
- Developed a passion for advocating for others
- Improved his life exploring technology and accessibility apps
- Gained the desire to improve accessibility applications, specifically using a QR reader
- Made three videos to describe apps that help circumnavigate dyslexia
- Studied dyslexia and found that 48 percent of individuals in prison are likely dyslexic, and he wants to help so individuals to not have to turn to crime to survive
- Spoken to legislators in St. Paul to tell his story and ask for support for the dyslexic community
- Become a Peer at Access North with the desire to assist others

We have been recently been able to connect Mark with a consumer who faces similar issues. Mark has a wealth of information he has shared. He finds it important for others to know they are not alone in their struggles and sometimes that is the first step towards independence. Mark has a helping heart and is excited to be a part of our peer mentoring program. Access North is lucky to have Mark join our team!

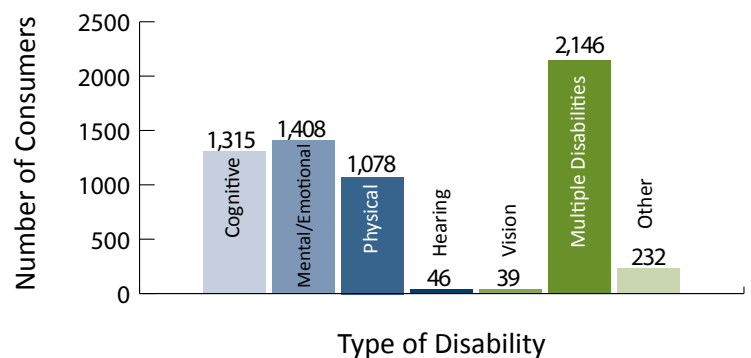
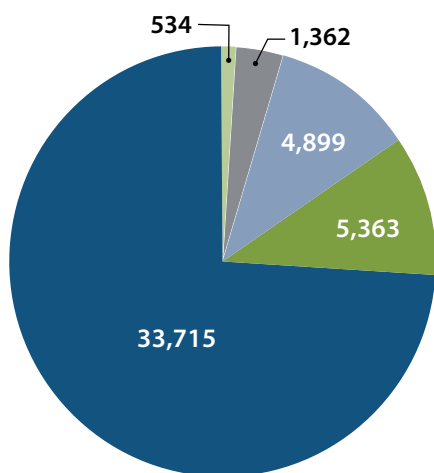
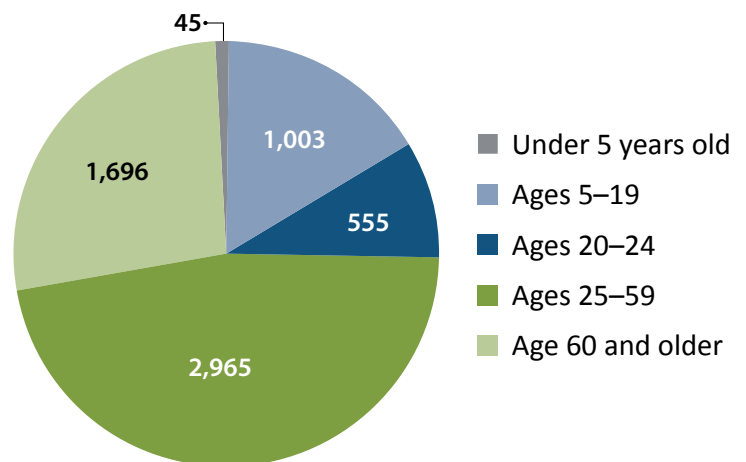


Independent Living Funding Distribution

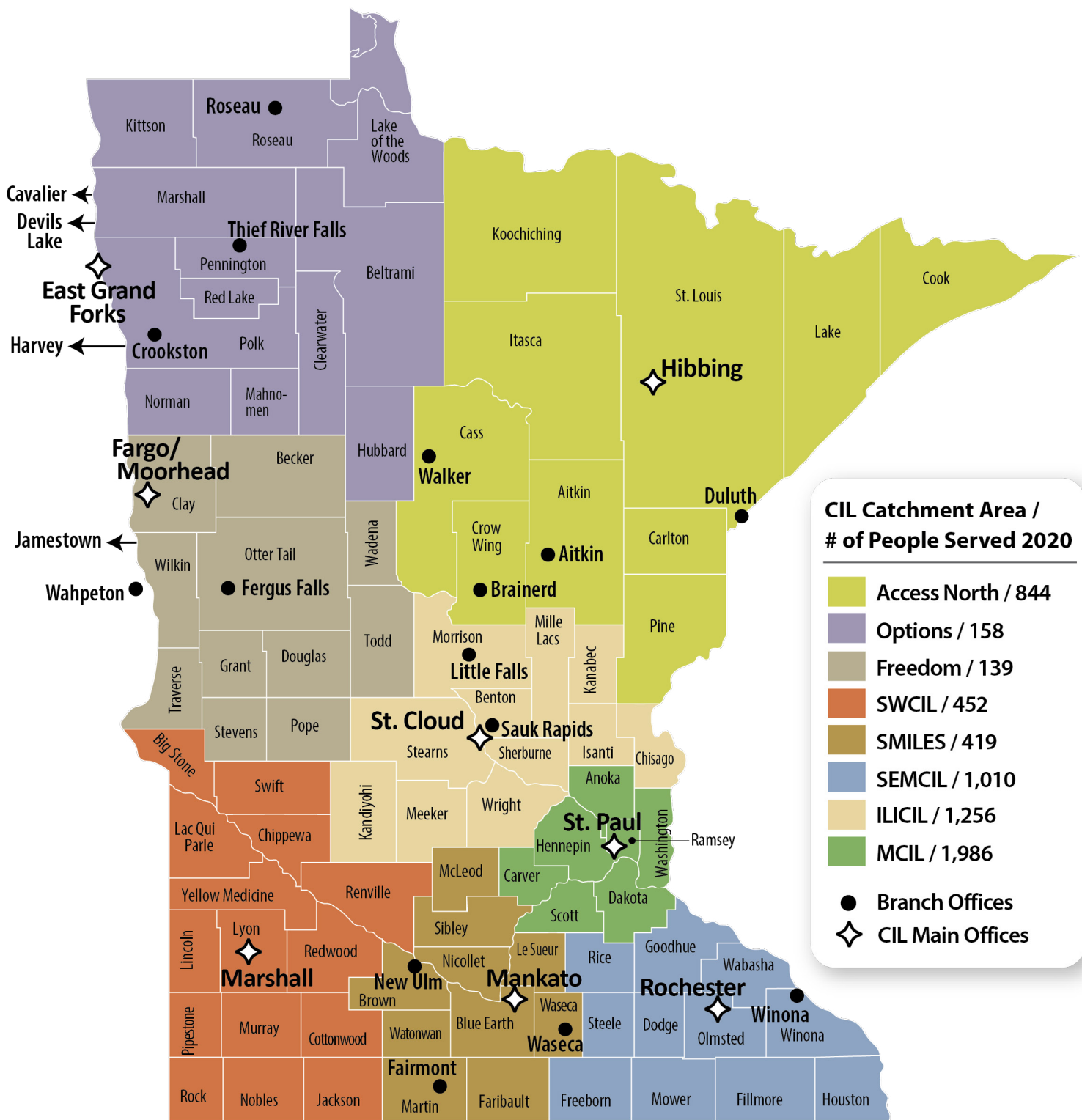


Total Number of People Served by Centers for Independent Living

In FFY 2020, 6,264 individuals were served by Minnesota's eight CILs which provided a total 50,205 received services, including the Independent Living (IL) core services.



- Advocacy
- IL Skills Training
- Information and Referral
- Peer Counseling
- Transition Services



MNSILC has worked collaboratively with many partners. Working together to improve the ability of Minnesotans with disabilities to live independently benefits our entire community.

The following partners were instrumental in the work done by this council:

- Access North Center for Independent Living
- FREEDOM Resource Center for Independent Living
- Independent Lifestyles, Inc. - A Center for Independent Living
- Metropolitan Center for Independent Living
- OPTIONS Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living
- Southern Minnesota Independent Living Enterprises and Services
- Southeast Center for Independent Living
- Southwestern Center for Independent Living
- Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- State Services for the Blind
- Minnesota Council on Disabilities
- State Rehabilitation Council-General
- State Rehabilitation Council-Blind
- Olmstead Implementation Office



For more information about the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council or to request an alternative format go to: **mn.gov/deed/silc** or **mnsilc1215@gmail.com** or call: Jo Erbes, Coordinator at **612-518-1487** or **MN Relay at 711**.